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DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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SECRETARY WATT OUTLINES CONSERVATION POLICY TO AVERT CRISES AND TO SERVE PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Interior Secretary James Watt told leading conservationists today that "we will use the resources of the earth, but we will do so with the knowledge that mankind has been sustained by this earth for thousands of years and will be dependent upon it for generations to come."

In keynoting the 46th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Washington, D.C., Watt emphasized that the Administration under President Reagan "will be in the mainstream of the conservation-environmental movement of America."

"There are four solid cornerstones in this Administration's conservation policy," Watt said.

"1. America must have a sound economy if it is to be a good steward of its fish and wildlife, its parks, and all of its natural resources.

"2. America must have orderly development of its vast energy resources to avert a crisis development which could be catastrophic to the environment.

"3. America's resources were put here for the enjoyment and use of people, now and in the future, and should not be denied to the people by elitist groups.

"4. America has the expertise to manage and use resources wisely, and much of that expertise is in State Government and in the private sector."

The Secretary said he will work not only to find a balance between competing uses of resources today, but will seek to balance how much we can use today without depriving future generations of the resources they too will need.

Some Federal conservation programs have been cut back or consolidated, Watt said, as part of the mandate from the public "for an end to inflationary overspending and suffocating overregulation by the Federal government."

"Throughout the Department there has been a severe belt-tightening," Watt said. "We have looked at all programs; we have put many on the shelf. Some of these programs will come off the shelf in better economic times."

The Secretary said that faster but orderly development of energy and mineral resources is sound environmental policy.

"If orderly development of our energy resources with proper environmental safeguards is not allowed," Watt warned, "economic, political or social pressures could force the Federal government to order a crash program under crisis conditions to develop energy resources. If this were to occur, the destruction of our fragile ecological system could be experienced -- particularly in my native West."

(more)

Emphasizing the Department's "Good Neighbor" policy, Watt said: "On all fronts we will be removing unneeded regulations and policies which have irritated people not only in the West but all over this country."

Watt said that the key to conservation is enlightened management of resources.

"Conservation is not the blind locking away of huge areas and their resources because of emotional appeals," Watt said. "Man has altered nature. He must now provide a balance in the use of nature's provisions. It is an awesome responsibility and one we cannot shirk."

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